

A WEIRD NARRATION OF EVENTS, INVOLVING LOVE, SORCERY AND THE GREAT MYSTERY OF LIFE AND DEATH.

THE SOUL JUGGLER.



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CHAPTER I. The Dead Man.

THE bells were calling early morning workers to church in an attic lodging, in Sydney, Australia, a man lay dead. He had just died.

The hands of his door turned. A beautiful child stood on the threshold, mostly girls friends of the Freemans, and I had mounted my horse and said "Good night;" amid much good-natured pleasantness and laughter.

"Riding past the White Hart hostelry, Church-Comet, I saw a tall, gentleman enter that inn. I noticed her particularly, for strangers were so infrequent in the village that they attracted attention. A cheese buyer from Derby," I said to myself, as I rode quietly along.

"It was late when I reached the Hall, and, except for the sleepy boy waiting to take my horse, I found that the household had retired.

"There she went out, closing the door behind her. Yet Mark Gunnery was dead.

On Monday at mid-day, the postman, busting in to deliver a letter, nearly stumbled across the corpse.

A staff child and letter had both of them reached Mark Gunnery too late.

The next day, after some inquiry, they inferred the body. No one seemed to know anything about him. A few lines in the newspapers recorded a sudden death and lonely burial. And that might have been the end. But something happened. It was this. A fellow-tan of the chambers bought the old bookcase at a sale after Mark Gunnery's decease. Before making use of it, however, he had it thoroughly renovated, and in doing this a secret drawer was discovered.

It contained a closely written manuscript. Read as follows:

"About four years ago a thing happened to me which sealed my destiny and damned my life.

"I was in England then. I had been married over five years to a woman of considerable beauty. We had one child, a daughter, three years of age, who was the pet of the household and the charm and comfort of my life. My wife, Violet, had been a Miss Freeman, of Long Chase, and was the daughter of a near neighbor and an old friend of my father. We lived pleasantly and fairly kindly together in the old hall, with my father. I never crossed her temper, and was affectionate to her after a sort, but we neither of us pretended to have much love for each other. She was in her way, an ambitious woman, and had married me for money and position, and a name that was known and respected throughout the southwest of Derbyshire. No doubt I was regarded as a good catch, or Violet Freeman would not have married me. I was not particularly handsome, but education, travel, and society had done something for me, and certainly made me to differ somewhat from the bulk of men of the well-to-do farming class around us.

"I had no recollection of my mother. My father, Ambrose Gunnery, could trace his ancestry for centuries. He used to live sometimes, when in a more than ordinary social mood and say: 'You must marry, Mark; you are my only son, and there has always been a Gunnery at Church-Comet Hall.'

"So it was settled between us. I had, of course, had sundry love affairs in my youth and college days, but nothing serious and had then met with no woman to whom my heart had gone out in a supreme affection. To this one peasant and attractive girl was much as another. The young lady of my father's choice was praised for her sweet and amiable disposition. If she approved this plan, and willed to marry me, it would please the Square—as Church-Comet called my father—and no doubt I should be happy enough with her. So, at the time I thought little more about it, but applied myself to the business affairs of the large farm and small estate belonging to Church-Comet Hall.

"Violet Freeman had evidently become very much in love with me. So the long time sped smoothly, and the date of our marriage was in due course arranged.

"The night before the ceremony I had returned late from Long Chase to

Church-Comet. It had been an evening of much merriment and congratulation. The bride's home was filled with wedding guests, mostly girl friends of the Freemans, and I had mounted my horse and said "Good night;" amid much good-natured pleasantness and laughter.

"Riding past the White Hart hostelry, Church-Comet, I saw a tall, gentlewoman enter that inn. I noticed her particularly, for strangers were so infrequent in the village that they attracted attention. A cheese buyer from Derby," I said to myself, as I rode quietly along.

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off amid showers of rice and salt, were less better or worse, old men and women and wives that following day we left London for Paris.

"To Violet the continual change and while of pleasure and gaiety, finding new scenes and new experiences—during our two months on the Continent, had a charm and novelty entirely new to her. After the conference, it was a general turnout in Rome. He was a gay, gay fellow, and without being ostentatious, knew how to make his money useful to others as well as himself."

"The last few weeks had, no doubt, passed very friendly with May and Pansy Bassett, and we were almost continually together since property transferred to England, there was a free and easy cordiality not always extended to a stranger upon French soil.

"Hector Bassett had brought his own carriage and horses with him from Australia, and there was scarcely a handsomer turnout in Rome. He was a gay, gay fellow, and without being ostentatious, knew how to make his money useful to others as well as himself."

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